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THE CONFECTIONERY
OF MONSIEUR GIRON



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THE CONFECTIONERY
OF MONSIEUR GIRON

I love everything that's old.

—Mr. Hardcastle

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No. 1.

To

The Transylvanian, 1829-1915

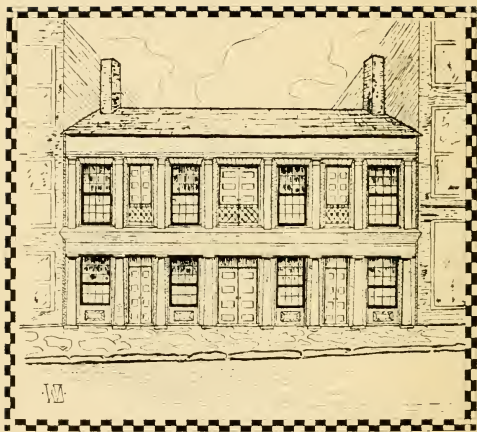
Oldest College Magazine in America

In a somewhat different and briefer form *The Confectionery of Monsieur Giron* appeared for the first time in *The Transylvanian* for April, 1907. It was reprinted in *The Lexington Herald* for August 15th, 1915. Since that time,—even while this final form of the essay was preparing for the press—the Confectionery has been sadly dismantled.

W. K. D.

"Warrenton": *Richmond, Kentucky*

December, 1915



THE CONFECTIONERY OF M. GIRON

THE CONFECTIONERY OF MONSIEUR GIRON

An Essay

By

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THE CONFECTIONERY OF MONSIEUR GIRON

I

IT may be that Lexington, Kentucky, is the most famous little city in the United States. But whether it be or no, it is among the quaintest of places and one of the most unique. Its reputation and distinction do not depend upon a solitary claim—not alone upon horses and hemp, tobacco and whiskey—but upon nearly every degree of progress and every phase of human endeavour.

Christened with the news of the patriot blood spilled at Lexington, its natal day was coeval with that of the Republic, and following

thence, its own annals have reproduced largely the history of the State and Nation.

The streets of the present day are of many widths, varying from those of the pioneer village to those of a busy city—throbbing heart of the entire Blue Grass Country. Side by side stand the old rambling mansions of slave days with the newer residences, more consciously compact; and nestling there between buildings of dizzy heights is the small two-storied structure with roof slanting steep to the street over small-paned windows — the business house of an ante-bellum metropolis. A strange mingling, this, of ease and opulence, commercialism and romance, history, made, and history, making; and whoever is even so slightly versed in the history, traditions, and associations

that enshroud the streets of this Kentucky Lexington, will find a zestful pleasure in walking through them—diversified as they are with commingled styles of architecture, lawns, and gardens, covering the entire nineteenth century and overlapping the eighteenth and twentieth—if he dwell for a time about those scenes of especial interest, minded only of the past.

Thus, putting aside for a while all thoughts of the present with the rush and bustle of the time, it is something akin to a joyous inspiration to look upon the oldest institution of learning west of the Alleghenies . . . to know that in that house over there the Marquis de La Fayette was entertained, and addressed from the steps in front a crowd of enthusiastic Kentuckians . . . to see, farther down, the law office of Mr.

Clay, and opposite, his residence previous to *Ashland* . . . in sight of this the spot whereon John Bradford printed the *Kentucke Gazette*, first newspaper in the *West* . . . and adjoining that, the Confectionery of M. Giron, containing the beautiful dancing-rooms of former time. Then there are countless others: let Postmaster Ficklin's house be mentioned, where Jefferson Davis lived while a student at Transylvania; the Elkhorn, first water to be plowed by the first successful steamboat in the world—that of Edward West in 1793; Postlethwaite's Tavern (now the Phoenix Hotel); and the church of the Reverend James Moore, sweet-souled parson upon whose ears forever smote the sweet celestial harmony of the spheres like music playing in the distance;—all

perpetuated in song and story to represent a short but most romantic portion of the history of the United States.

II

THE Confectionery of M. Giron stands out as one of the most colourful, though not the most noted, of all the places in Lexington. At this far time it owes its chiefest interest to Mr. James Lane Allen's story, *King Solomon of Kentucky*, long pointed to by eminent critics as one of the best in the English language. Therein may be seen, as afar down the dim aisle of Memory, M. Giron, his Confectionery, and his Ball-Rooms, set forth by the hand of a master in bright colours and strong, yet soft and mellow as if by age.

This M. Mathurin Giron emigrated from France to America and entered the fair land of Ken-

tucky somewhere near the dividing line of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His advent can not be nearer ascertained. He is unlike many characters in legendary and historical fiction who, when traced through the misty years to their daily lives, and subjected to the critical test of serious research, lose most of the subtle charm pervading them as *personæ* of a beautiful story. Their beauty, bravery, and brocaded costumes are dissipated all too often as the clear light of cold scrutiny falls upon them. Not so with M. Giron—"that M. Giron who made the tall pyramids of méringues and macaroons for wedding suppers, and spun around them a cloud of candied webbing as white and misty as the veil of the bride." He stands out lovable, in fact as in fiction. Not even the skilled

hand of him who has saved his name from oblivion could add a further lustre to his being. Whether viewing him through the pages of a romance, or looking into the musty old record-books of the county for a summary of his earthly barterings, or listening to the narrative of oral tradition from some aged townsman, he measures to the stature of a personage of no little charm and consequence.

He was an attractive little figure, as they say, rotund and rosy, suave and sunny. But how small of stature—scarcely over five feet in height! And how ample of girth! Being, therefore (unlike the most of us), as broad as he was deep; or nearer yet, not shallow because he was wide. His dress was something Frenchy, if not fastidious; his face was

smooth-shaven; his speech was a piquant, broken English with an animating accent. Moreover, he was a gentleman of exceeding tact and kindliness, possessing the rare human quality of sympathy; was ever active, cordial, and merry; and a man, withal, of great adaptability, who never alienated a friend, never irritated an enemy.

Naturally enough such a man as was Mathurin Giron, who had dwelt in a far country and seen much of the world in the bargain, would be of more than passing interest in those days in Kentucky. And the more especially so when he would tell at length to his wondering auditors the stories of his travels and adventures (actual or not) in other times and other climes: for the associated press and the railways had not as yet dispelled as a mist of the morning

the vast, dense *Wilderness* lying between Kentucky and the *Old Settlement*, Virginia. The people were all but shut in from the news and happenings of the outside world. But few books and tidings from other lands were finding their way across the Allegheny barrier. M. Giron, then, was a transplanted cutting of European wonders, a veritable summary of Old World events. He claimed to have been a French grenadier, and in Napoleon's Guard—a thing much doubted by reason of his height,—and said as how he had lived in nearly every country of Europe. One day, surrounded by the usual group of admirers, he enumerated the places he had visited and the countries in which he had lived, not forgetting to give with grave accuracy the time of his residence in each. It was

then that the wag in the crowd (now remembered solely for that happy stroke of wit) observed that the gentleman from over seas was an hundred and sixteen years old, forsooth. Poor old enthusiast! Guileless Mathurin! Not a wilful Munchausen, my children, but how hopelessly entangled now in his own venial fabrications!

III

FROM the eventful day that M. Giron first set foot in the streets of Lexington, the trade of a *confectionary* was for him vocation and avocation alike. And the records are there to prove it. How he strove with tessellated fortune, against debt and mortgage, in good days and ill, through plenty and pestilence, goes to form the homely tale of life's fever. He is heard of first in 1811, when, to meet the increasing labours of his calling, he thought of an apprentice. He articulated one accordingly (journeymen were not yet become obsolete), Francis Rennals, by name, a youth of eighteen summers, who was to find in M. Giron a master well dis-

posed and kindly. The apprentice bond, aside from him, has an archaic interest of its own, illustrative of olden times and customs. The indenture as recorded

Witnesseth, that Francis Rennals aged eighteen years is bound apprentice to said Mathurin Giron until he arrives at the age of twenty-one years, who is to teach him or cause him to be taught the trade of a confectionary in a masterly and workmanlike manner, also reading, writing and Arithmetic, including the rule of three with propriety; and at the expiration of said apprenticeship is to furnish said apprentice with a decent new suit of Clothes in addition to his common wearing apparel & pay him in specie three pounds ten shillings, and during said apprenticeship is to observe toward said apprentice a proper and becoming treatment and behaviour and such other duties as the law prescribes.

Following the terse and meagre records on through the years, it will be found that M. Giron first had for partner in the trade a certain Henry Terrass who had been a confectioner before this connec-

tion was formed. That was in 1811. Their shop stood then as now on Mill Street near Short, a small wooden structure twenty-two feet of front, and doubtless bore the firm name, *Terrass & Giron*, above the door. Next it will be discovered that a Mr. Peter John Robert succeeded to the place of coöwner, to share and share alike in either profits or losses according as fate decreed. Now it was *Giron & Company*—a much more sounding name. But that, too, was to give way to change and leave at length M. Mathurin Giron, *confectionary*, as sole proprietor and manager.

Fortune favoured the little Frenchman, and not long after he had bought an interest in the house on Mill Street—in 1818, to be exact,—he purchased another, twenty-four feet wide and of brick,

on Short Street. His Confectionery was near Short Street with only one building between his house and the corner, and his new purchase was just behind this corner building, and in close proximity to the Confectionery itself. The lots were joined in the rear, forming a right angle. The upper rooms of these two buildings were destined to become the famous Ball-Rooms of M. Giron; for the deed-book of 1829 has been found to refer to the brick house on Short Street as "being the house at present used by the said Giron as a Ball room and a Supper room."

Just when the present Confectionery was erected can not now be said with accuracy. Referring again to the records, it will be learned that in 1829 the same wooden *frame* building "22 feet by

50 feet back, now occupied by said Giron as a confectionery and dwelling house," was still standing on Mill Street. Not long afterwards, however, probably very soon thereafter, an adjoining lot, twenty-two feet in width, was acquired by M. Giron, and the present attractive old weather-worn building of brick was put up on the combined space of forty-four feet. It stands now just as it was, just as M. Giron built it, save for a balcony of iron lace along the upper story in front. On this balcony the dancers were used to come to cool between the sets; and on circus days and during all pageants it was crowded with spectators to better see the *Elephant* and other "natural curiosities." There are halls in the centre below and above; the confectionery shop was on the lower

floor; and the ball-rooms were above it, extending back, with great panelled folding doors of some beautiful wood between them, opening to the high ceiling. There was a vast open fireplace in each room, with mantel-pieces made of cherry-wood, and supported by graceful columns.

The style of architecture employed is unusual, dignified, and symmetrical. With its air of sturdy grace, the old Confectionery looks as if designed by Gideon Shryock who conceived Morrison College, of Transylvania, and the old State Capitol at Frankfort. The semi-classical note of the Tuscan pilasters along the front is strongly suggestive of this gifted Kentucky architect of the first half of the eighteenth century. For its simple attractiveness, just as for its interest as a survivor of

a period that is past but never to be forgotten, around which hover many associations not possible now to another, this aged remnant of days long dead must remain as a sort of shrine for all lovers of Lexington's history.

In its appointments, M. Giron's Confectionery was well up with any of its time. For those curious of its contents may be mentioned, from a list of record in the Fayette Court House, the following accessories: for furnishings, 1 side board, 3 Carpets, 4 Bureaus, 3 Settles, 6 Beds & Bedding, 10 Looking Glasses, 14 Tables, 17 doz. Chairs, and 1 fine mantel time piece; for china and glass, 140 Glass Jars, 13 Glass stands, 800 bottles, 12 Demi-johns, 24 Decanters, 2 Sets of China, 22 doz. plates, and 50 dishes; for silver, 6 doz. Silver Tea Spoons, 2 doz. Sil-

ver Table Spoons, 1 doz. Gilt Silver forks, 1 Tea pot of Silver, 1 Silver cream pot 28 Ounces, 4 large Gravy Spoons, 1 Silver Gravy boat 22 Oz., and 2 Silver Ladles. Verily, a fine array and a splendid establishment!

Upon this site has been a confectionery for over a century. It is a long period of continuous duration for so fragile a trade, but there have been but four people in charge of it—Terrass, Giron, Rear-don, and Norris.

During M. Giron's proprietorship, he always served the suppers at the balls given in his rooms above, and was caterer at many a famous banquet. It was he, and none other, who made the wonderful cake, all round and rich and high, for the Marquis Fayette, and covered it with a brilliantly beautiful flag of tinted icing in red and

white and blue. These spacious rooms were used also, and many's the time, as a meeting place by political clubs; especially to be mentioned, as tradition has it, during the high tide of Mr. Clay's career, and through the heated campaigns of Martin Van Buren and William Henry Harrison. And therein plays were sometimes acted. If the truth were known it might be possible to mention many a noted player who had trod those boards and fretted his little hour on the stage.

IV

AFTER the dissolution of the firm of *Giron & Company*, M. Giron continued the trade alone with more or less success until the ever memorable year of 1833. Lexington was not then the Lexington that he had known first: he had seen the growth of her University, the ingress of the first railroad, the spread of her distinction, and the distinction of her public men. He had seen all; he had contributed his part—a fine and notable part—toward the up-building of this, the metropolis of the *West*. He had, and others had; and the dawning of the summer of 1833 found them dreaming big dreams and seeing visions of

greater things to be. "Yes, the summer of 1833 was at hand, and there must be new pleasures, new luxuries; for Lexington was the Athens of the West and the Kentucky Birmingham."

Close upon the growth of wealth and education was that of a brilliant society. Travellers of this period pronounced Lexington one of the best built and most fashionable of places; and in hospitality, manners, and intellectual attainments, no whit below the more pretentious of the Eastern cities. Thus, notwithstanding the bitter polemical contentions and sectarian prejudices, and despite the puritan element, deep-rooted, and ever threatening to wipe out the mere suggestion of pleasure, pleasure continued. Those who read the *Observer and Reporter* of March 28th, 1833, saw this an-

nouncement, printed in italics under a bold heading:

DANCING SCHOOL

Mr. Xaupi, a native of France, having been for a great many years a resident of Virginia, and now in Louisville, respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of this City and its vicinity, that he will open on Saturday, 8th day of April next, a DANCING ACADEMY in this place, where he will be in a few days, and attend to the calls of all the persons who will favour him with their patronage.

If an experience of a great many years in his profession, assiduity, the utmost exertions for the progress of the pupils entrusted to his care, and the best recommendations, can entitle a person to patronage, Mr. Xaupi feels perfectly confident, that he shall obtain it in Lexington, and will be very grateful for it.

Mr. Xaupi and family intend to settle permanently in this place.

M. Xaupi had realised the opportunities for practising his profession in America, and upon his arrival in this country settled in aristocratic, pleasure-loving old Virginia. He resided there for several years, until, fascinated by

the reports from the *Transylvania Country*, he decided to follow the wave of emigration to that happy land of plenty and contentment, where his sad little life was so soon to become a memory.

Those who read the notice from M. Xaupi on the twenty-eighth of March found the same announcement in the next issue of April the third. Among them were Mme. Blaique and Mr. P. Jones. Now this Mme. Blaique, lately of France, had taught a dancing class at Lexington in recent times, as had P. Jones, and seeing their rights disputed by a new-comer, they respectfully announced their intentions of continuing their dancing academies just as before.

Mr. Jones notified his patrons through the *Observer and Reporter* that his class at Mr. L. Taylor's ball-room "on Main Street, near

the Postoffice," would be opened on Saturday the thirteenth of April, and that he would conduct classes "for young ladies and masters" and an evening school for gentlemen. In addition to these classes, one would be opened for gentlemen who desired to become acquainted with that delightful instrument, the violin.

And Mme. Blaique tendered her thanks, as well, for patronage in the past. She placed in the same paper a very flattering article concerning her ability from the Bardstown *Herald*, in which town she had recently given dancing lessons with so much success and satisfaction. She was to have two classes, also, one for young ladies, and one for young gentlemen. "Waltzes, Galopedes, Cotillions, and all fashionable modes of dancing" would be taught.

During the month M. Xaupi arrived at Lexington. He arranged in good time with his compatriot, M. Giron, to have his headquarters in the Giron Ball-Rooms above the Confectionery, and further prosecuted his campaign by inserting the following observations upon genteel deportment in the *Observer and Reporter*, putting particular stress upon dancing, the fecund source, according to him, of all gentility:

In presenting my respects to the Ladies and Gentlemen of Lexington, I beg to submit to their patronage my intention of opening a Dancing Academy, wherein my particular attention shall be devoted to the pupils entrusted to my care, for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of the Art I teach—an Art, which, reviewed in its proper light, must be acknowledged as a genteel accomplishment, absolutely essential to those whose lot it is, or in future may be, to move in the polite circles of society, and which has ever been considered an accompaniment to, if not a necessary part of, a finished education.

In this institution, Dancing will be taught according to the acknowledged rules of the Art, and the greatest care shall always be taken to inculcate a genteel deportment to the scholars, and impart to them proper manners of civility.

Experience daily shews, that the distinguished regard which is invariably paid to well educated youths, is the result of proper instruction and attention. Indifference, if not contempt, is the lot of those who are ignorant of the manners of civility, which are indispensably necessary, not only in private company and public assemblies, but also in our general intercourse with the world. They should be observed, even in the casual meeting of our most intimate acquaintance. By adhering to the rules of politeness, respect and decency are preserved—and a person who will particularly observe them, must not only obtain self gratification, but also the esteem and consideration of others.

The accomplishment of dancing is the main source from which these benefits are derived—the utility and advantages of this excellent Art, are incontestable. Innocent pleasure, gratification and promotion of health are combined in its practice.

Besides this dancing class, M. Xaupi planned to have each month a great ball, a *Cotillion Party*, most beautiful to see. The first of these

was given on May the third. The ladies who had received *invitation-tickets* were expected to attend the May Ball, and the gentlemen were informed that they might obtain admission cards at Mr. Giron's Confectionery and at Mr. Postlethwaite's Tavern.

The second (and last) *Cotillion Party* was on May the thirtieth; and this, following, is the last announcement that the poor little Xaupi ever made—printed in beautiful italics:

The Ladies and Gentlemen of Lexington are respectfully informed that a Cotillion Party will be held next Thursday 30th inst. in my Dancing Rooms at Mr. Giron's. The Ball will open at eight o'clock.

Tickets for gentlemen will be delivered at Mr. Giron's. Good music may be expected.

—Xaupi.

Time soon flew around to the thirtieth; "the day passed, the

night came on, and M. Xaupi gave his brilliant ball." It was a great event in social circles. Kentucky's fairest were present, and with them rival beauties, their visitors, from other States. "The men came in blue cloth coats with brass buttons, buff waistcoats, and laced and ruffled shirts; the ladies came in white satins with ethereal silk overdresses, embroidered in the figure of a gold beetle or an oak leaf of green. The walls of the ball-room were painted to represent landscapes of blooming orange-trees, set here and there in clustering tubs; and the chandeliers and sconces were lighted with innumerable wax-candles, yellow and green and rose."

What a time for the flocking together of local Brummels and Beau Nashes! What a gathering of the fair and fickle—prinked

and powdered ladies in patches and laces and jewels! Old *King Solomon* attended M. Xaupi's ball too, but "in his own way and in his proper character, being drawn to the place for the purpose of seeing the fine ladies arrive and float in like large white moths of the summer night; of looking in through the open windows at the many coloured waxen lights and the snowy arms and shoulders; of having blown out to him the perfume and the music; not worthy to go in, being the lowest of the low, but attending from a doorstep of the street opposite."

This ball was the gay predecessor of a gloomy aftermath, the most melancholy in the annals of Kentucky—nay, the *Mardi Gras* of the summer of '33. "While the bows were still darting across the strings, out of the low, red east

there shot a long, tremulous bow of light up towards the zenith. And then, could human sight have beheld the invisible, it might have seen hovering over the town, over the ball-room, over M. Xaupi, the awful presence of the plague."

"Poor old Xaupi—poor little Frenchman! Whirled as a gamin of Paris through the mazes of the Revolution, and lately come all the way to Lexington to teach the people how to dance. Hop about blithely on thy dry legs, basking this night in the waxen radiance of manners and melodies and graces! Where will be thy tunes and airs to-morrow? Ay, smile and prompt away! On and on! Swing corners, ladies and gentlemen! Form the basket! Hands all around!"

The cholera came on apace, and with fury. The dread days of the

London pestilence were to be repeated in Kentucky. The streets were now emptied by death and by flight. The busy hum was hushed. Hundreds were swept away. M. Xaupi was among the first. Old *King Solomon of Kentucky*, the big-hearted, the much-persecuted, the loathed and reviled, laid him to rest in the old Baptist burying ground, where came at that solemn hour all creeds and all parties.

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BUT the plague was not everlasting. Toward the autumn, its ravages lessened and finally subsided, just as in the greater plague of 1665. M. Giron, like the good *Grocer of Wood Street*, with his wife and daughter escaped. Those who had fled were now returned. The grass was cut from the streets; business was resumed; sorrows and losses began to be forgotten. The more fortunate helped the less fortunate; and *King Solomon* received his "coronation."

M. Giron, after experiencing many degrees of fortune, at last obtained an unshared title to his property. The days that now came were happy; his wife, Phil-

berte (the daughter of a worthy citizen-Frenchman, M. Vimont, of Millersburg, Bourbon County), was a sweet-tempered companion; his daughter, Cecilia, grew to be a very beautiful lady.

Years passed on as they must, and M. Giron grew old. His daughter had married and moved away, as daughters will, and should, and Mme. Philberte had donned the cap and shawl. The life of a *confectionary* was a hard one now for the master and he must soon give it up. In 1844 he chose to seek retirement. Then it was that he sold his Confectionery and departed forever from Mill Street. Let it be hoped that he sold it, not to answer the implacable call of debt, but of his own good will, thinking to have a quieter and less arduous life.

Let the final picture of him be

that of one independent of charity, a town magnate, reposing in well-earned ease upon a comfortable fortune, built up by active and unceasing labour—a man of note and counsel, whose heaviest duties were to sit with a friendly pipe among his fellows, given to much harking back to olden times, and to the making of prophecies of better days to come. Think of him and good Philberte as awaiting their summons in happy, untiring love, at peace with the world and all men.

*His day was done, and the sands had run
Through the measuring glass so long,
That now there was left to his setting sun,
But a pipe, and a bowl, and a song.*

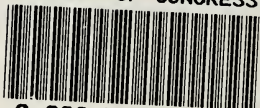
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His grave in the old burying ground has long since been erased. No record in metal or stone pro-

claims the legend of his mortal strivings. But the old Confectionery! Will it be to him a fitting and lasting monument in this world of transient memories? Ah, no. Yet in the book of *The Flute and Violin* will he have his lasting epitaph, *monumentum ære perennius* to the memory of M. Giron—him who scattered the sweets of life along his way.

Of this book two hundred copies have been printed, at Charlottesville, Virginia, by The Michie Company, in the month of December, nineteen hundred and fifteen. This is number

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